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ABSTRACT

Rational decision making by leaders in higher education and similar institutions suffers from both a lack of relevant data and the failure to use data when it is available. The purpose of this paper is to describe a process which when applied seems to facilitate the rational decision making processes of an institution's leadership. The process will get data into administrative thinking and decision making discussions. It enables the majority of persons serving in leadership positions to function as leaders. Basically, the process is not simply one of gathering data and reporting it to a body of decision makers. Rather, it involves the decision makers in the process of obtaining and utilizing appropriate information and influences their thinking processes. The process then is formative as well as summative. The process is called a diagnostic review and self-study. The diagnostic review and self-study was developed expressly to meet the needs of voluntary organizations in periods of special crisis and decision as well as to facilitate a process of ongoing planning and decision making. (Author)

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FACILITATING LEADERSHIP: A BROADER LOOK AT DATA BASED INTERVENTIONS*

by

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Rational decision making by leaders in higher education and similar institutions suffers from both a lack of relevant data and the failure to use data when it is available. The purpose of this paper is to describe a process which when applied seems to facilitate the rational decision making processes of an institution's leadership. The process will get data into administrative thinking and decision making discussions. It enables the majority of persons serving in leadership positions to function as leaders. Basically, the process is not simply one of gathering data and reporting it to a body of decision makers. Rather, it involves the decision makers in the process of obtaining and utilizing appropriate information and influences their thinking processes. The process then is formative as well as summative. The process is called a diagnostic review and self-study. The diagnostic review and self-study was developed expressly to meet the needs of voluntary organizations in periods of special crisis and decision as well as to facilitate a process of ongoing planning and decision making.

What It Is

The diagnostic review and self-study is a concentrated, comprehensive, professional analysis demanding full staff involvement, written diagnosis and recommendations, and the development of organizational development skills in the ranks of all persons involved. It was developed for use with voluntary organizations

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and has a built-in bias in favor of general systems theory or what I like to call open systems theory.

The Diagnostic Review draws on various management models and techniques, and takes into account the peculiar dynamics of voluntary, nonprofit organizations, such as the higher need of volunteer-based organizations to maintain involvement, consent, and sense of purpose, and, at the same time, to integrate these with the business side of the enterprise. The current social and financial pressures on non-profit organizations are taken into account as well.

The Review is designed for organizations engaged in community action, religious, charitable, welfare, and youth work. The diagnostic approach is equally applicable to neighborhood, metropolitan, regional, and national units, ranging in size from large urban or national organizations to relatively small churches, agencies, and neighborhood organizations.

In Periods of Special Crisis and Decision

The Diagnostic Review is designed for specific points in the life of a voluntary organization which involve major turning points and moments of organizational soul-searching. The review is designed to provide quick, comprehensive knowledge at these crucial moments of crisis and opportunity. This knowledge will assist and guide a major group in the organization when the group has an acute sense of urgency. This urgency may come from:

- a sense of unrealized potential
- mounting deficits, approaching fiscal insolvency
- conflicts in the organization about its future
- an increasing dissatisfaction with drift and inaction
- staff or lay morale
- major changes in the organization's environment
- declining participation or appeal of standard programs

- an attempt to re-tool to be more relevant to social problems
- the desire of new lay officers or a new executive (e.g. new clergy, new president) to take new approaches

How Does It Work?

A Concentrated, Comprehensive, Professional Analysis

Concentrated: The analysis takes about a month to complete from the time a contract is signed to delivery and discussion of a final written report (this insures no loss of momentum and no loss in the timeliness of the recommendations).

Comprehensive: The analysis takes a systems approach, looking at all factors and bringing them together: organizational goals, personal values, finances, social issues, organizational traditions and structures, community relations, facilities, personnel. The approach is technical, yet eclectic, drawing on various professions, technical specialties, and organizational models. It uses extensive experience with similar organizations to bring perspective to the problems of a particular organization.

Professional: The analysis exhibits the highest standards of research and consultation in regard to expertise, confidentiality, accuracy, and thoroughness.

With Your Full Staff Involvement

By involving the organizations power group and representatives of all constituent groups, the Diagnostic Review provides high expertise to facilitate (not detract from) the participation and sense of responsibility of the leaders, members, and constituents of the organization. It is designed to help leaders lead. These persons are interviewed in depth. The reports and recommendations are prepared in consultation with them, and are followed up by full and open discussion. The approach recognizes each organization as having an innate

intelligence within itself that, when facilitated, will identify its own real needs and similarly reveal the best approach toward fulfilling them. The Diagnostic Review and self-study simply reveals the knowledge and crystallizes the motivation latent in the organization. Ideas and opinions of all relevant groups are accurately reported. The contract includes extensive pre-study planning and follow-up consultation after the study is completed. When dealing with local units of national organizations, it is often desirable for a knowledgeable staff member (e.g., from a district of regional office) to join the external consultant in conducting the study. The internal people implement all action plans. If they need training in processes like team building, the consultants train them to do so. Under no conditions do the consultants up stage the existing leadership structures.

And Written Diagnosis and Recommendations

The Diagnosis is a detailed description of the problems and potentials of the organization as viewed by the consultants, drawing on interviews, site visits, community consultation, observations of meetings and events, survey of records and documents. In addition to the consultant's views, the data from people in and outside the organization is reported (anonymously) in detail. The report includes extensive documentation (reports, statistics, etc.) in the appendices.

The Recommendations are based on a systems approach, getting together the various factors and releasing the potential of your particular organization. Depending on the Diagnosis, recommendations might include:

- long-range planning processes
- new program priorities
- new location and facilities
- fiscal management systems and actions
- personnel changes and staff reorganization

- reorganization of the lay structure
- training programs
- approaches to new constituencies
- public relations and promotional activities
- fund raising methods and targets
- market and community surveys
- mergers and inter-agency linkages

There is also the slight chance that the Diagnostic Review might recommend that no action be taken or that the organization consider a planned end to its existence.

Some Organizational Outcomes

The Goal of Organizational Diagnosis

Careful, in-depth interviews with people belonging to groups crucial to the organization's well-being (staff, governing board, clients or consumers, etc.) result in a detailed description of the problems and potentials of the organization. The diagnosis gives leadership a quick and impartial assessment of the "state of the organization." Also, as previously noted, the interview process itself facilitates a sense of participation and responsibility by clients, members, and leaders of the organization in developing the diagnosis.

Leadership Education and Training

The diagnostic review often leads to experience-based workshops and seminars for the leadership group. Among these workshops are those which deal with:

- Concepts of "open system" management
- Value Resolutions (methods of resolving value differences)
- Initiating the Organization Renewal Process (ITORP)
- Determining Organizational Objectives
- Team Development
- Creativity

- Goal-Setting
- Administration by Objectives
- Conflict Management and Resolution
- Communications Training
- Problem-Solving
- "In-Basket" Analysis
- Women in Leadership
- Internal Consulting Skills
- Career Path Planning

Developmental Research

The Review is also action-oriented research. It applies data obtained in the context of established theory and is utilized in an organization's day-to-day operations.

Planning

Working with an organization's staff, consultants establish an ongoing process that will help the organization's leadership answer, at any time, six basic questions:

1. Where are we now? (current situation)
2. Where do we want to go? (goals and objectives)
3. How do we expect to get there? (strategies and policies)
4. What organizational structures are needed? (task force or single leader)
5. Who is going to pay? (source of funds)
6. How will we know when we've arrived? (evaluation plan)

Leadership Assessment

An excellent alternative to psychological testing, management assessment uses simulations and situational testing to assure the choice of the best available person for critical management positions. Consultants will conduct the assessment or design a program for the organization's own use.

Job Enrichment

Working with the organization's leadership, consultants develop ways to help each person enrich his work situation. It is through assumption of more responsibility that many persons gain an increased sense of accomplishment. A sense of accomplishment has proven to be the strongest and most lasting motivator with the key persons in the leadership structure.

How Do We Develop a Working Relationship?

The external consultant confers with a staff group to develop a statement of the ways in which different services may help satisfy those needs. A joint analysis of these possibilities produces a tentative plan for action.

On this basis, a "Working Agreement" is prepared. This defines the services to be performed; the consulting relationship; whatever specific objectives for projects or programs that can be identified at this point; the time period for which consultants will serve; and the cost for the services covered in the agreement.

The "Working Agreement" will apportion the services desired into a series of steps. Each step has a task analysis and related performance objectives. The "Working Agreement" is jointly reviewed. Only client satisfaction with a completed step will open the door for the succeeding step or steps.

The final "Working Agreement" as modified and approved by both parties serves as the contract for the consulting relationship. Whatever the specific terms of the Working Agreement finally reached, the consultant's objective is to foster the client-consultant relationship with:

- joint evaluation and revision of plans
- an increasing awareness of the client organization and its needs
- open and effective consultant-to-client communications

- continuing development of alternatives and possible solutions to specific problems
- operational flexibility for dealing with unexpected problems

What are the Structures that Need to Change and Why?

We never know until the "in house" group decides. We observe three broad dimensions of organizational functioning. These are: unity, internal responsiveness, and external responsiveness.

1. Unity. The first property of being a system is coherence and centeredness. An open system has a unity, but this unity is not at the price of internal fragmentation or closedness toward the system's outside environment.

2. Internal Responsiveness. An open system is not fragmented. All parts are responsive and functionally interdependent. No part can be a rigid "empire". The parts of an open system are themselves open systems.

3. External Responsiveness. The open system does not achieve its centeredness by fencing itself off from the outside. Unlike the fanatic, who becomes unified by a closed, over-simplified world view, the open system is both centered and open. It is open both internally and externally.

Study of the highest fulfillment in individuals is limited to the persons who have achieved that high level of being. By the same token, study of the "health" of organizations is limited to those organizations which have reached a higher state of fulfillment. The optimal potential of a given organization seems to be very existential and geared to the stated goals and purposes of the organization.

How Will the Changes Occur?

My experience is in highly creative and exciting ways. In higher education, some of the outcomes have been:

1. The conversion of a nearly bankrupt private college in to a viable state supported institution with a quadrupled enrollment.

2. The merger of two national professional organizations that had been discussing the issue off and on for 15 years.

3. The stabilizing of a chronic, eight year power struggle among the trustees of a community college.

4. The implementation of an ongoing planning and administration by objectives processes in a small, successful, liberal arts college.

Summary

I believe we have gone full cycle now. I started with the issue of how to get leaders to obtain, think about, and utilize good data. I explored the deep and penetrating nature of a diagnostic review and self-study and the need for existential problem solving. At the same time, I suggested an open systems model for examining data. I also addressed the problem of how does the change process work and how this process applies to the original issue of teaching and motivating leadership persons to obtain and utilize data and apply it to improve organizational functioning.